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Donner: Non-Conformity Inspires Spying In The Modern University

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"The attitude of the FBI toward universities is that student political consciousness is based on a Communist plot," stated lawyer Frank Donner at Dinkelspiel yesterday.

"The surveillance-informing system has become rooted in universities for one simple reason—the emergence of strong currents of political dissent and non-conformity among students."

Government surveillance is deeply destructive of the freedoms of speech and assembly. "There is a mocking gap," he added, "between the government's professions of freedom and its actual practice."

The nation-wide spread of investigatory activity by the FBI, HUAC, (CIA) and ultra-right-wing groups seriously blights the heart processes of democracy. "The systematic expansion of these secret practices represents an effort to insure conformity without seeming to."

Donner noted that surveillance and informing have become "as American as Coca-Cola and apple pie." He called FBI investigation of individuals' past and present associations "commonplace."

Denial Of Rights

Legislative restraints on freedom are not as dangerous as the investigative processes that accompany them. The techniques of intimidation produce fear and anxiety; further, the individual is prejudged and denied his rights to self-defense and judicial review. Thus "the general effect is a maximum return of repression for a minimum investment of power."

The FBI investigation is preventive—based on attempts to ferret out "the kind of people who might at some time in the future participate in some activity that might be illegal." The right to free political association is thus irreparably damaged by the fact that a person's past may at some future date be used against him.

Turning to specific instances of surveillance on the college campus, Donner noted that investigation, while shrinking in scope among adults, is greatly expanding among students. Many of the larger or urban campuses, he noted, have permanent FBI agents assigned to them.

Besides these, there are field agents who check in on the less active campuses from time to time.

Administrative Collaboration

Donner gave examples of tailing, intimidation, opening mail, infiltration of organizations by informers, and other activities among not only "campus radicals" but also those associated with them. Most of these related to what seemed to be the biggest problem on the campus—administrative collaboration with the FBI.

The role of university administrations, he said, ranges from regarding themselves as a branch of the security establishment to outright refusal to cooperate. In many instances university administrations turn over political material about individuals to the FBI and even helping secret investigations.

He emphasized that informers were more important even than the full-time government agents. They are indispensable to the policing of thought, speech, and association. He illustrated this by comparing it to a physical crime. These, he noted, can be detected by the act itself and the traces it leaves. A deviation from standards in speech or "subversive" thinking, on the other hand, leave no trace; informers are thus needed to estimate.

Informers Are Important

Informers, he maintained, are more than mere suppliers of information; they are enlisted for the purpose of falsely professing sympathy with an organization in order to betray it.

The FBI and other agencies "poison relations of trust which must prevail between a university and students, professors and students, students and students."

"Many rightist students are experts as this business of informing. Others are encouraged to spy on their fellow students if they feel their life or career might be 'blighted' by past membership in controversial organizations."